

JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING PLAN TO PHASE OUT CSC LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARY WORKERS

We, the undersigned, oppose the plan by Correctional Services Canada (CSC) to phase out the role of librarians and library workers.

Outside the context of a prison, libraries and professional library staff provide a variety of services and supports to communities. For many of us, libraries are fundamental to our human rights. CSC directives state that prison libraries should mirror what is found in the community. Those libraries employ library workers to ensure the diverse needs of the community members are met. Prisons must do the same.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARIES IN PRISON

The realities of the Canadian carceral environment are that information poverty and information inequality exist. There is a crisis in accessing information amongst incarcerated Canadians, whether it be educational, recreational, legal, health, or other types of information. In federal institutions, there is no internet access, inadequate computer access, and waiting lists for school and other rehabilitative programs (Office, 2020). Without librarians and library workers, people will continue to reintegrate into an information-driven society lacking the digital and information skills, knowledge, literacy, or capability for problem-solving or decision-making.

Prisons are for rehabilitation and to prepare people for their return to the community. To achieve this there must be support for the incarcerated population to access reading, cultural, healing, educational, and legal material. In [CSC Commissioner's own update](#) celebrating Family Literacy Day (January 26, 2026) :

[literacy] is about staying connected, building confidence, and investing in your future ... Improving your reading and writing skills can open doors and make daily life easier.

Library workers directly support and develop literacy skills, without them, these outcomes are not possible.

THE LIBRARY USER IN PRISON

Research shows that half of those incarcerated in Canadian prisons have experienced childhood abuse and that "it is the loss of culture and language, social and political inequalities, intergenerational trauma, and economic barriers that have led to different experiences for Indigenous peoples from other groups, including overrepresentation, in the criminal justice system." (Bodkin et. al., 2019).

Statistics further show that up to 20% of incarcerated people have attended residential schools, with numbers of those impacted by intergenerational trauma likely higher

(Kouyoumdjian et. al., 2016; Hackett et. al., 2016). A large percentage of the incarcerated population come to the institutions with low literacy, mental health complexities, and addiction issues (Kouyoumdjian et. al., 2016). 25% of incarcerated men in Canada are afflicted by some cognitive deficit, which may require extra support for education and vocational training (Stewart, Wilton, & Sapers, 2016).

Commissioner's Directive (CD) 720 (2025) ties library services to education programming within federal prisons. Library resources are a necessary complement to the classroom, as well as for all other prison programs (Commissioner's Directive, 2025). The correctional library is the service for which both staff and incarcerated people have requested expanded access (Office, 2020). Adequate access to library services and materials improves the daily lives of both correctional staff and incarcerated people. Well before the current proposed library cuts were announced, the Office of the Correctional Investigator (2020) warned, "some CSC run libraries are falling short of providing the resources set out in its own policy."

THE LIBRARIAN/LIBRARY WORKER IN PRISON

Librarians are highly educated professionals guided by core values including access, equity, intellectual freedom, and public good, with knowledge in social responsibility, and building quality, diverse collections that reflect patron needs. What does that look like in a prison environment? Library professionals take carts of books into the units, yes - but they also manage and develop the library collection guided by the needs of their readers and library users; they provide programming like literacy activities, learning opportunities for Indigenous fathers, and writing workshops; they assist in research for their patrons to support school projects, or help with release plans, and so much more. Moreover, the library workers in prison libraries benefit prison staff, correctional officers (COs), program officers and others with whom these relationships are mutually beneficial and inform the library work. This would go away with the removal of library staff.

Several standards and guidelines outline the importance of libraries in prisons staffed by library professionals, including the American Library Association's Standards for Library Services for the Incarcerated and Detained (2024), the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Guidelines for Library Services to Prisoners (2023), and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners -also called the Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015). The decision to remove librarians and library staff goes against all these guidelines and recommendations set by professionals.

Access to information is part of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is importantly supported and facilitated by library staff and educators. The decision to remove librarians also goes against the Correctional Service Canada's National Guide for Institutional Libraries (2012), which includes librarians. Given the broad responsibilities assigned to the library by CD 720 and incarcerated people's needs for

educational support, it is essential to have dedicated staff working in an institution to collaborate with educators, program providers, and other CSC staff. The minimum, as laid out by the CD 720 directive, ensures "that library services support all institutional programs and address the inmates' needs for computer literacy and recreational, cultural, religious, spiritual, educational, legal and informative materials, while taking into consideration the requirements of the correctional environment" (2025). A library professional will not only create meaningful and relevant collections and programming, but will fulfil the institution's legal obligation to provide access to legal materials, required under the Corrections and Conditional Release Regulations.

Library services require qualified staff to bring expertise and focus to address the particular needs of incarcerated people and the institution's requirements. Replacing a prison librarian with program officers or COs is not appropriate, nor is it possible for staff of a community public library to adequately step in to fill this role. As CD 720 explicitly requires the provision of library services that are comparable to those in the community while still meeting the unique operational, cultural, and security needs of correctional environments (2025), these responsibilities therefore must remain in the hands of trained library professionals who possess specialized expertise. Public library workers, who are not prepared for correctional settings, do not have that specialized expertise. The time public library staff could offer would be severely limited, and further complicated by the continuously-changing conditions required by a prison. Those of us who have volunteered with prison libraries for decades can attest to the difficulties and time-intensive nature of coordinating with institutional staff, leaving much less of our time for building collections and programs.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action #30 and 38 call for the elimination of the overrepresentation of Indigenous adults and youth in custody and Call #36 speaks to providing culturally relevant services to inmates on issues such as substance abuse, family and domestic violence, and sexual abuse. The Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) and Prison Libraries Network assert that prisoners have a right to access information "to advance themselves through literacy, lifelong learning, social engagement, and cultural enrichment" (CFLA-FCAB 2024). Moreover, CFLA asserts that while Indigenous peoples are overrepresented in Canadian prisons due to the social and political system of colonialism, incarcerated Indigenous people have a right to access resources on Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and materials about the impacts of colonialism. Meeting these calls, and the rights of prisoners, are important motivators in the work of library professionals as they build collections and literacy programming inside prison libraries.

Library workers establish a space necessary for strengthening literacy, learning, reading, and dreaming; for building potential, connections and creating moments of humanity; and importantly, allowing for opportunities to share important lived experiences and knowledge.

We urge Correctional Services Canada to abandon this misguided plan to phase out the role of librarians and library workers, and instead to consult with library professionals going forward, and to fulfil its legal obligation to meet the information needs of community members who are incarcerated.

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